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SUBJECT: PARTY YOUTH LEADERS ADVOCATE FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

1 (U) Summary. In an effort to curb the potential for election-related violence, youth leaders from Ghana's main political parties have been holding joint sessions with younger party activists in which the leaders appear together and stress the need for tolerance during the election. Last week POLOFF met separately with the chief youth organizers for the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). In a country in which most violence is instigated by the younger members of society, the sessions urging peace are a welcome development. End Summary.

¶2. (U) POLOFF met separately with Charles Owradu of the NPP and Ludwig Hlodze of the NDC during the week of November 10. (Note: Owradu is also the NPP's liaison to international organizations, while the NDC's Hlodze is also an advisor to the party's presidential candidate. End Note). Both leaders described their participation in the "Inter-party Youth Committee" or IPYC. In early to mid-2008 youth leaders from Ghana's four major parties toured the country visiting party youth activists, advocating for a peaceful election process. Traveling in the same vehicle and staying at the same hotels, the youth organizers met with party supporters in each of Ghana's ten regions. The youth leaders spoke on topics including the need for discipline and tolerance, the role of the Electoral Commission in administering peaceful elections, and the factors that could work against free elections. The meetings, sponsored by a German development agency and chaired by religious and civil society leaders, drew audiences composed of young people active in all parties. The NDC's Hlodze said that it was possible that further activities would take place in Accra prior to the December 7 election. He added that his party was planning a November 27 "Truth and Peace" march and rally in Accra, to mobilize their youth supporters. The rally would include messages calling for a peaceful election. Owradu told POLOFF that he thought the university campuses had been quieter this election than in previous years.

¶3. (U) Both party officials described a similar system for communicating to youth supporters, reaching out through regional and district party youth organizers down to a youth organizer responsible for one to several of Ghana's 22,000 polling stations. A similar network exists to include university and technical school students. Hlodze said that the NDC planned to use university students as polling agents on election day. (Note: NDC leaders have told EMBOFFs that they believe better educated and motivated polling agents--a problem the NDC had in 2004-- will reduce opportunities for ballot tampering. End Note.).

4.(U) When asked by POLOFF how the parties' youth supporters will deal with electoral disappointment, the leaders gave similar answers. Owradu of the NPP said that, while not contemplating a loss (or even a run-off election) he thought that youth supporters would take their direction from party leadership. Hlodze provided a similar answer. He added, however, that if post-election violence did occur, it would likely start in northern Ghana. He also noted that he

thought there had been an increase in weapons in the country, but didn't provide specifics.

5.(SBU) Comment. Ghana's news media continue to carry daily stories of civil society and religious leaders calling for peaceful elections. That the political parties have engaged in extensive pre-election efforts to calm youth members is encouraging. The parties' ability to communicate to the grassroots level provides some capacity to reduce tensions should there be localized outbreaks. While young people may react strongly to their parties' loss, particularly in areas of northern Ghana, the tone set by the presidential candidates and other party leaders will be key in reducing any tensions following a close election. End Comment.

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